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Tourism Digital Marketing based on the Sustainability Model in Bali

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Abstract

Tourism destinations increasingly rely on digital communication strategies to balance economic growth with environmental and cultural preservation. This study examines the implementation of a sustainability-based digital marketing model within Bali's tourism industry, emphasizing how digital communication supports sustainable destination branding and stakeholder engagement. Using a mixed-method approach, this research integrates content analysis of digital platforms, in-depth interviews with tourism practitioners, and visitor perception surveys to identify key sustainability narratives. Findings indicate that effective digital storytelling centered on local culture, environmental responsibility, and community empowerment significantly enhances tourists' trust and loyalty while mitigating overtourism pressure. Social media and website analytics demonstrate that campaigns highlighting authentic, eco-conscious experiences produce higher engagement and conversion rates compared to traditional promotional strategies. Moreover, the study underscores the critical role of communicative transparency and co-creation between stakeholders in sustaining Bali's image as a responsible global tourism hub. This research contributes to communication and marketing scholarship by proposing an integrative framework linking sustainability communication, digital marketing innovation, and destination competitiveness. The model offers practical guidance for policymakers, tourism boards, and marketers seeking to implement ethical, sustainable, and digitally driven promotional strategies in other global destinations.

Keywords: Bali; destination branding; digital marketing; sustainability communication; sustainable tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a strategic role in Indonesia's economy, with Bali positioned as its flagship destination, renowned for its unique cultural heritage, spiritual traditions, and coastal landscapes that attract global visitors (Fianto & Andrianto, 2022). However, rapid growth has intensified environmental pressure, cultural commodification, and social inequality, prompting a shift from mass tourism toward sustainable models balancing economic benefits with ecological and community well-being (Subadra et al., 2024). Global discourse on sustainable tourism emphasizes responsible consumption, destination resilience, and stakeholder participation, increasingly mediated through digital communication technologies (Armutcu et al., 2023).

The proliferation of social media, mobile apps, and digital platforms has revolutionized destination branding, experience curation, and governance, positioning digital marketing as a core tourism communication instrument (Putranto et al., 2023). These channels enable personalized storytelling, real-time engagement, and data-driven insights for sustainability-focused management (Susilo, 2023). Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube profoundly shape destination image, travel inspiration, and purchase intent, particularly among youth relying on user-generated content and influencers (Pratiwi et al., 2022). In Indonesia, post-COVID digital campaigns by government and local actors have revitalized demand while promoting health protocols, environmental initiatives, and community programs (Kominfo, 2022).

Communication scholarship stresses integrating digital marketing with sustainability principles—transparency, inclusivity, and long-term value—for local communities (Fianto & Andrianto, 2022). Sophisticated digital practices correlate with higher perceived service quality, cultural richness, community welfare, and resource efficiency (Subadra et al., 2024). Indonesian scholars highlight narrative framing, cultural symbolism, and platform selection in shaping perceptions, advocating digital storytelling that mitigates socio-cultural impacts (Riyadi & Susilo, 2019).

In Bali, digital marketing communication (marcomm) leverages Instagram, TikTok, and apps to promote sustainable tourism, using visuals of rice terraces, temple ceremonies, and eco-villages to foster authentic branding aligned with Tri Hita Karana—harmony among humans, nature, and divinity (Growfish, 2024). Influencer partnerships with local creators spotlight regenerative practices like zero-waste homestays in Ubud, yielding 30% higher engagement than generic ads (Pratiwi et al., 2024).

Hashtag campaigns (#BaliBerkelanjutan, #SustainableBali) amplify user-generated content on conservation, boosting trust and curbing overtourism in Seminyak and Canggu (Pratiwi et al., 2022). Analytics from Google and social insights enable real-time tweaks, like off-peak promotions for East Bali, easing environmental loads (Armutcu et al., 2023). Integrated marketing communication synchronizes websites, WhatsApp bookings, and VR tours, while the Bali Tourism Office's dashboard tracks carbon footprints and incomes for targeted, eco-certified

campaigns (Putranto et al., 2023). Challenges include rural digital divides and greenwashing, but community-co-created content enhances authenticity and loyalty (Susilo, 2023).

Bali's dual identity—global hotspot with cultural-spiritual values—makes it ideal for sustainability-based digital marcomm studies, vulnerable to shocks yet innovative post-pandemic (Subadra et al., 2024). Village tourism and eco-resorts use digital tools for responsible promotion and impact reporting (Growfish, 2024). Gaps persist: few integrative models link digital practices to sustainability outcomes; limited theory on mediating global demand-local priorities; insufficient incorporation of local wisdom and regenerative trends (Pratiwi et al., 2024).

This study proposes a sustainability-based digital marcomm model for Bali, integrating communication strategies (platform, content, engagement) with sustainability dimensions (environment, culture, economy) (Fianto & Andrianto, 2022). Objectives: (1) map Bali's practices; (2) develop framework; (3) recommend implementations. It advances communication theory, offers adaptable guidance, and draws on 2020-2024 scholarship.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively examine tourism digital marketing based on a sustainability model in Bali. Mixed-methods approaches prove particularly valuable in tourism communication research, as they combine the generalizability of quantitative data with the contextual depth of qualitative insights, facilitating a holistic understanding of how digital strategies influence sustainability outcomes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design aligns with recent studies in Indonesian tourism contexts, where integrating survey data with stakeholder interviews has revealed nuanced relationships between digital marketing sophistication and sustainable practices (Fianto & Andrianto, 2022; Subadra et al., 2024). By employing a sequential explanatory strategy, the research first gathers quantitative evidence on patterns and correlations, then uses qualitative data to interpret and explain those findings, enhancing explanatory power and methodological rigor.

The philosophical foundation rests on pragmatism, which prioritizes practical solutions to real-world problems over rigid adherence to positivist or interpretivist paradigms. This stance suits the study's aim of developing an actionable model for Bali's tourism stakeholders, allowing flexibility in addressing both measurable digital marketing metrics and subjective perceptions of sustainability (Saunders et al., 2019). Trustworthiness is ensured through established procedures such as triangulation across data sources, member checking with participants, peer debriefing among researchers, and a detailed audit trail of analytical decisions (Denzin, 2017). Data collection spanned January to March 2025, following ethical approval from an institutional review board, with all participants providing informed consent either digitally or in person, and strict measures to protect anonymity and data confidentiality.

The target population encompasses key stakeholders in Bali's tourism ecosystem: digital marketers and managers from hotels, travel agencies, and community-based enterprises; tourism officials and policymakers at provincial and

district levels; and both domestic and international tourists who have engaged with Bali's digital promotions. Bali serves as the purposive case study site due to its status as Indonesia's premier tourism destination, where sustainability pressures from overtourism intersect intensely with advanced digital marketing adoption (Subadra et al., 2024; Susilo, et al, 2025). For the quantitative phase, a sample of 400 respondents was drawn through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across stakeholder groups: approximately 150 marketers and managers, 100 officials, and 150 tourists. This size was calculated using G*Power software for multiple regression analysis, targeting a statistical power of 0.80, significance level of 0.05, and medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) (Faul et al., 2009). Multi-stage cluster sampling focused on high-tourism zones including Denpasar, Ubud, Kuta, and Nusa Dua, yielding an 82% response rate ($n = 328$ final responses).

Complementing this, the qualitative phase involved purposive and snowball sampling to recruit 25 participants: 10 marketers or managers with at least five years of experience in Bali tourism, 8 mid- to senior-level officials, and 7 recent tourists who discovered Bali through digital channels. Participant selection prioritized diversity in roles, experience, and demographics, with data saturation confirmed after 22 interviews, consistent with guidelines for qualitative sample adequacy (Guest et al., 2006). Inclusion criteria required direct involvement in Bali's tourism digital marketing and familiarity with sustainability initiatives, ensuring relevance to the study's objectives.

Data collection instruments were developed and validated through a multi-step process. The quantitative survey instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire adapted from established scales in prior tourism communication research. It included 20 items measuring digital marketing dimensions—such as website quality, social media engagement, search engine optimization, email campaigns, and paid advertising—rated on a 5-point Likert scale (adapted from Subadra et al., 2024; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$). An additional 15 items assessed sustainability outcomes across environmental (e.g., waste reduction), socio-cultural (e.g., cultural preservation), and economic (e.g., community income) domains, also on a Likert scale (adapted from Fianto & Andrianto, 2022; $\alpha = 0.89$). Demographic variables and controls for tourism experience were incorporated. The questionnaire underwent pilot testing with 30 respondents, confirming reliability (all $\alpha > 0.80$) and clarity, with distribution occurring via online platforms like Google Forms (shared through WhatsApp groups and Instagram) and in-person at tourism hotspots.

Qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews lasting 45 to 60 minutes, conducted via Zoom or face-to-face in Indonesian or English. The interview guide explored digital strategy implementation, sustainability integration challenges, stakeholder collaboration, and model recommendations, allowing flexibility for emergent themes. All sessions were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Secondary data enriched the dataset through systematic content analysis of 500 digital artifacts from 2023 to 2025, including 300 social media posts from official Bali tourism accounts (e.g., @visitballiofficial on Instagram) and 200 posts from prominent hotels and tourism villages. Coding focused on sustainability themes (e.g., eco-practices, cultural narratives, community benefits) and engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments), following Krippendorff's (2018) guidelines for content analysis in digital media studies.

Quantitative analysis proceeded using IBM SPSS version 28 for descriptive statistics—means, standard deviations, and frequencies—to identify overarching patterns in digital marketing adoption and sustainability perceptions. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4 tested the hypothesized relationships, ideal for exploratory research with non-normal data and smaller samples (Hair et al., 2022). The measurement model evaluation confirmed reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$, composite reliability > 0.70) and validity (average variance extracted > 0.50 , heterotrait-monotrait ratio < 0.85), while Harman's single-factor test addressed common method bias (explaining less than 50% variance). The structural model assessed path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance ($Q^2 > 0$), with bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) for significance testing. Key hypotheses examined included the impact of digital marketing sophistication on sustainability performance (expected $\beta > 0.3$), with multi-group analysis comparing domestic and international tourist responses.

Qualitative data underwent reflexive thematic analysis using NVivo 14 software (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The process began with immersive familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts, followed by systematic open coding to generate initial codes. These evolved into axial themes through iterative searching, reviewing, and refinement, culminating in a coherent thematic map linking digital practices to sustainability dimensions. Content analysis paralleled this, employing both quantitative frequency coding for theme prevalence and qualitative interpretation of narrative frames. Inter-coder reliability reached Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.82$ through dual coding of 20% of the sample by independent researchers.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative strands occurred at the interpretation stage, using joint displays to juxtapose statistical results (e.g., significant PLS-SEM paths) with illustrative quotes, revealing convergences such as strong correlations between social media engagement and environmental awareness corroborated by marketer narratives (Fetters et al., 2013). Divergences, like tourists overestimating sustainability impacts, prompted deeper exploration of greenwashing perceptions.

Table 1. Validity, Reliability, and Rigor

Aspect	Quantitative	Qualitative
Reliability	Composite reliability > 0.70 ; McDonald's $\omega > 0.80$	Inter-coder reliability (Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.82$); audit trail
Validity	Convergent/discriminant (Fornell-Larcker); nomological	Credibility (triangulation, thick descriptions); transferability (thick context)
Bias Control	Anonymity; back-translation; pilot testing	Reflexivity journal; prolonged engagement

Source: Author (2025)

To uphold validity and reliability, quantitative aspects emphasized convergent and discriminant validity via Fornell-Larcker criteria and nomological validity through established scale correlations (See Table 1). Qualitatively, credibility stemmed from triangulation and thick descriptions, transferability from detailed contextualization of Bali's tourism dynamics, and dependability from an audit trail and reflexivity journal documenting researcher biases. Ethical protocols

included secure data storage compliant with Indonesia's personal data protection regulations, special safeguards for rural or vulnerable participants, and right to withdraw at any stage.

While this methodology yields robust insights, limitations include its cross-sectional nature, which precludes establishing causality—future longitudinal designs could track campaign impacts over time. The focus on urban and semi-urban Bali hubs may underrepresent remote villages, a delimitation addressed partially through snowball sampling. Self-reported data risks social desirability bias, mitigated by anonymous surveys and multi-method triangulation (Subadra et al., 2024). Overall, this rigorous, integrated approach not only tests the proposed sustainability-based digital marketing model but also advances methodological standards in tourism communication scholarship, offering replicable protocols for similar contexts (Yang et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings: Measurement and Structural Model

The PLS-SEM analysis confirmed the model's robustness. All constructs exhibited strong reliability and validity: Cronbach's α ranged from 0.82 to 0.94, composite reliability from 0.87 to 0.95, and average variance extracted from 0.62 to 0.76, surpassing thresholds (Hair et al., 2022). Discriminant validity held via Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios below 0.85. Common method bias was absent, as Harman's single-factor test accounted for 38.4% variance.

The structural model explained substantial variance: digital marketing sophistication (DMS) accounted for 52% of sustainability performance (SP) variance ($R^2 = 0.52$, $Q^2 = 0.34$). Path coefficients revealed strong effects. DMS significantly predicted SP ($\beta = 0.72$, $t = 14.23$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Social media engagement (SME) mediated this relationship (indirect effect $\beta = 0.31$, $t = 5.67$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H2. Environmental ($\beta = 0.68$), socio-cultural ($\beta = 0.65$), and economic dimensions ($\beta = 0.59$) of SP all loaded significantly on the second-order construct (all $p < 0.001$). Multi-group analysis showed domestic tourists rated SME higher ($\beta = 0.45$ vs. 0.28 for internationals, $p < 0.05$), while officials emphasized economic SP more than managers (See Table 2). Descriptive statistics indicated high DMS adoption ($M = 4.12/5$), with social media dominant ($M = 4.45$), but email marketing lagged ($M = 3.21$).

Table 2. Results of Hypothesis Testing and Structural Model Analysis

Construct Path	β	t-value	p-value	f^2	Supported
DMS → SP	0.72	14.23	<0.001	0.42	H1 Yes
DMS → SME → SP	0.31	5.67	<0.001	0.18	H2 Yes
SME → Env SP	0.68	12.45	<0.001	0.35	H3 Yes
SME → Soc SP	0.65	11.89	<0.001	0.32	H4 Yes
SME → Eco SP	0.59	10.34	<0.001	0.27	H5 Yes

Source: Author (2025)

Qualitative Findings: Emergent Themes

Thematic analysis yielded four superordinate themes: (1) Digital Storytelling for Sustainability Narratives, (2) Stakeholder Co-Creation Challenges, (3) Platform-Specific Engagement Patterns, and (4) Tri Hita Karana Integration.

Theme 1 dominated (32% codes), with marketers noting: "Instagram reels on rice terrace conservation get 5x shares; tourists tag #SustainableBali, amplifying our eco-message" (Manager, Ubud). This echoes content analysis: 68% of 500 posts featured sustainability frames, correlating with 25% higher engagement ($r = 0.62$).

Theme 2 highlighted tensions: "Villages lack digital skills; we co-create content, but greenwashing accusations arise without transparency" (Official, Denpasar). Officials stressed penta-helix collaboration (government-business-community).

Theme 3 revealed preferences: TikTok excelled for youth (Gen Z engagement +40%), while websites built trust for families.

Theme 4 linked digital marcomm to Balinese philosophy: "Tri Hita Karana—harmony with nature/gods/humans—guides our VR tours of temples, fostering respectful tourism" (Tourist, Australia).

Discussion: Digital Marketing Sophistication and Sustainability Performance

Quantitative results affirm that DMS strongly drives SP ($\beta = 0.72$), extending Subadra et al.'s (2024) findings where 16/20 digital indicators positively affected Bali village tourism sustainability. Unlike their null effects for email/online ads, this study shows holistic DMS impact, likely due to broader sampling. Social media's mediation role ($\beta = 0.31$) aligns with Armutcu et al. (2023), who reported SME boosting sustainable practices in Bali via authentic content. However, domestic-international differences nuance this: locals value economic SP more, reflecting post-COVID recovery priorities (Kominfo, 2022).

Qualitatively, digital storytelling theme corroborates Fianto and Andrianto (2022), where sophisticated websites shaped sustainability perceptions. Bali's practitioners operationalize this through visually compelling narratives (e.g., drone videos of subak systems), achieving higher engagement akin to Growfish (2024) reports of 30% uplift from influencer eco-collabs. Yet, co-creation challenges reveal gaps: digital divides in rural villages mirror Respati (2025), hindering inclusive marcomm. Tri Hita Karana integration innovates prior models, embedding cultural philosophy into digital content—e.g., reels linking rituals to conservation—differentiating from generic sustainability messaging (Amerta, 2025).

SME's pivotal mediation confirms H2-H5, with environmental SP most responsive ($\beta = 0.68$). This resonates with the Denpasar Festival study where SME mediated image-satisfaction-behavior (JCASC, 2025). Content analysis (68% sustainability posts) parallels Subadra et al.'s (2024) village findings, where online discovery drove visits. TikTok's youth dominance echoes global trends but locally amplifies #BaliBerkelanjutan, curbing overtourism per Pratiwi et al. (2024).

Stakeholder quotes reveal mechanisms: user-generated content fosters loyalty, but platform algorithms favor viral eco-stories over mundane economic impacts—explaining lower eco- β (0.59). This extends Susilo's (2023) narrative framing, suggesting Bali-specific hashtags enhance cultural authenticity.

Challenges like greenwashing (Theme 2) align with Nurbaiti et al. (2024), urging transparency dashboards.

Environmental SP leads due to visual platforms suiting Bali's landscapes, supporting Tri Hita Karana's nature harmony (Growfish, 2024). Socio-cultural follows, with co-created content preserving traditions amid commodification risks (UGM ETD, 2024). Economic trails, as digital boosts reach but local capture lags—echoing SME obstacles in Bali MSMEs (EJM, 2025). Multi-group insights: internationals prioritize env/soc SP, domestics economic—guiding segmented marcomm (e.g., TikTok for youth eco-stories).

This study advances communication theory by validating a second-order SP construct mediated by SME in digital marcomm. It extends IMC frameworks (Susilo, 2023) with sustainability mediation, and TPB integrations (Amerta, 2025) by embedding cultural philosophy. The model ($R^2=0.52$) outperforms prior Bali studies (e.g., 0.42 in IJBLE, 2024). Stakeholders should prioritize SME (Instagram/TikTok) with Tri Hita Karana narratives, invest in training for co-creation, and use analytics for segmentation. Policymakers: subsidize rural digital infrastructure; integrate dashboard metrics. Cross-sectional limits causality; longitudinal needed. Urban bias; expand to remote villages. Future: experimental designs testing campaigns; comparative Asia-Pacific studies. In sum, results empirically validate sustainability-based digital marcomm in Bali, bridging literature gaps with integrated evidence.

This study makes significant strides in communication and tourism scholarship by empirically validating a sustainability-mediated digital marketing model, addressing key gaps identified in prior literature (Fianto & Andrianto, 2022; Subadra et al., 2024). First, it advances integrated marketing communication (IMC) theory by demonstrating social media engagement as a critical mediator ($\beta = 0.31$) between digital sophistication and multidimensional sustainability performance. Unlike Susilo's (2023) focus on narrative framing in Southeast Asian tourism, this model integrates second-order sustainability constructs—environmental, socio-cultural, and economic—revealing differential impacts (e.g., environmental $\beta = 0.68$), thus extending IMC beyond promotional efficacy to long-term destination resilience.

Second, the findings enrich sustainability communication theory by embedding Bali's Tri Hita Karana philosophy into digital marcomm frameworks, bridging universal sustainable tourism principles with localized cultural wisdom (Growfish, 2024). Qualitative themes of co-created storytelling corroborate Armutcu et al.'s (2023) work on digital influence but innovate by showing how platform-specific engagement (e.g., TikTok for Gen Z) fosters normative behavior change, aligning with theory of planned behavior extensions in tourism (Amerta, 2025).

Third, through PLS-SEM rigor ($R^2 = 0.52$), the study contributes methodological advancements to mixed-methods tourism research, offering a replicable template for analyzing digital ecosystems (Hair et al., 2022). Multi-group nuances—domestic vs. international perceptions—refine stakeholder theory, highlighting segmented communication needs (Pratiwi et al., 2024).

Collectively, these implications reposition digital marcomm as a communicative infrastructure for sustainable development, not mere promotion. The model provides a extensible scaffold for global destinations, smoothing the

transition from theoretical abstraction to practical application while inviting future cross-cultural validations.

CONCLUSION

This study decisively establishes tourism digital marketing, when anchored in sustainability models, as a transformative force for Bali's long-term viability as a global destination. Through rigorous mixed-methods analysis—yielding a robust PLS-SEM model ($R^2 = 0.52$) and rich thematic insights—the research confirms that digital marketing sophistication, mediated by social media engagement, drives multifaceted sustainability performance across environmental stewardship ($\beta = 0.68$), socio-cultural preservation ($\beta = 0.65$), and economic inclusivity ($\beta = 0.59$). These findings transcend prior scholarship by operationalizing Tri Hita Karana philosophy within digital narratives, achieving engagement uplifts of 25-40% via co-created, platform-optimized content, while mitigating overtourism and greenwashing pitfalls.

Theoretically, this work reconfigures integrated marketing communication frameworks, positioning social media not as ancillary tools but as pivotal mediators that embed cultural wisdom into global discourse, extending IMC, sustainability communication, and stakeholder theories with empirical precision. Methodologically, it pioneers a replicable sequential explanatory design for tourism ecosystems, bridging quantitative generalizability with qualitative nuance.

Practically, the model equips Bali's stakeholders—marketers, officials, communities—with actionable imperatives: prioritize TikTok and Instagram for regenerative storytelling, subsidize rural digital training via penta-helix partnerships, and deploy analytics-driven dashboards for transparent impact tracking. Policymakers must enforce eco-certification mandates and segmented campaigns, targeting domestic economic priorities alongside international eco-appeals. For global destinations, Bali exemplifies how localized philosophy amplifies universal sustainability, offering a scalable blueprint amid climate and post-pandemic pressures.

Limitations notwithstanding—cross-sectional scope and urban bias—these results compel a paradigm shift: digital marcomm must evolve from transactional promotion to ethical infrastructure, harmonizing profit with planetary health. Future inquiries should pursue longitudinal validations, experimental interventions, and cross-regional comparisons to fortify this foundation. Ultimately, Bali's digital sustainability model does not merely sustain tourism; it regenerates destinies, affirming communication's power to architect resilient futures.

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